

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
LETTER TO EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES REGARDING EDITORIAL ON U.S. NUCLEAR
ARSENAL
MARCH 25, 1994

NEW YORK TIMES Mar. 31, 1994 Pg. 20

Small Nuclear Arsenal Is Defense Dept. Goal

To the Editor:

"Mr. Perry's Backward Nuclear Policy" (editorial, March 24) asserts that in a "recent" nuclear posture review I overturned a decision by former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and established a new role for nuclear weapons: deterring and responding to chemical and biological threats. The nuclear posture review, actually begun by Mr. Aspin, is still in its early days. I have not been briefed on interim progress, much less drawn policy conclusions from it or made recommendations to the President.

The review is examining force structure, doctrine and planning. Countering weapons of mass destruction is a proper subject for any De-

fense Department study. But drawing conclusions from a study still in progress is not how I do business.

You imply I am searching for ways to justify a large nuclear arsenal. Not so. I strongly support deep reductions in our nuclear arsenal. The Clinton Administration is working hard to insure that the Start I and II treaties are ratified and enter into force at the earliest possible date. We are committed to a nuclear posture based on the minimum number of nuclear weapons to meet our security needs.

Finally, we are not backing away from counterproliferation efforts. We are carrying them out across the whole spectrum of technologies. But counterproliferation cannot be unilateral, and we are working to enlist the former Soviet republics with incentives and help.

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Washington, March 25, 1994

NEW YORK TIMES

Mar. 24, 1994

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Mr. Perry's Backward Nuclear Policy

Under former Defense Secretary Les Aspin's leadership, the Pentagon put a high priority on curbing the spread of nuclear arms to other nations — and on reducing the role played by nuclear arms in Washington's own strategy.

That policy made sense because the proliferation of nuclear weapons potentially poses a direct danger to the United States and its allies and because the Pentagon, with its overwhelming superiority in conventional arms, has no need to rely heavily on a nuclear arsenal that will only encourage other nations to emulate it.

Now Mr. Aspin's successor, William Perry, seems to be turning this astute policy upside down. In a recent review of U.S. nuclear posture he established a new role for nuclear arms: deterring and responding to chemical and biological threats.

At first blush that seems reasonable enough. The United States is committed to global bans on chemical and biological weapons and to ridding itself of them. So why not use nuclear arms to

counter any use of these weapons by an adversary?

One reason is that the U.S. has no need to use nuclear arms for this purpose. It already has ample conventional force to counter chemical and biological threats. Ask Saddam Hussein, who did not dare use his chemical weapons in the Persian Gulf war in anticipation of the allies' assault because he knew that if he did, nothing would stop them from occupying Baghdad and getting rid of him.

Worse yet, Mr. Perry's plan to have the Pentagon prepare for such nuclear contingencies would legitimize nuclear arms instead of stigmatizing them. Increasing the number of nuclear targets to include every suspected chemical and biological weapons site drives up the requirement for warheads.

The new policy reeks of a desperate effort to find any possible justification to maintain the Pentagon's huge but obsolescent nuclear arsenal. It would only encourage would-be proliferators to follow Mr. Perry's lead — backward.